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THE THIEVES OF THE GREEN ZONE

BY PATRICK COCKBURN

Baghdad.

Soon after the fall of Baghdad last year, an Iraqi working for a US organisation found that the private American security company under contract to the Pentagon to protect him showed decreasing interest in his safety. He discovered the reason was that his guards had become arms dealers. The Iraqi, a returned exile, was living in a house in the Green Zone, the heavily fortified US headquarters in the centre of Baghdad. It was formerly Saddam Hussein's headquarters. The security company guards had discovered caches of valuable high-quality weapons abandoned by his presidential guard.

"They were taking the weapons and storing them in our house before selling them," complained the returned exile. "There were so many explosives there that I did not even dare smoke in the house and I am a chain smoker."

He and a companion took photographs of the heaps of weaponry and later showed them to officials in the Pentagon but they were not interested. Baghdad is awash with stories of the corruption, cronyism and incompetence of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority, which was dissolved at the end of June. Many of its officials were in Iraq because they were ideological neo-conservatives or were simply well connected to the Republican Party or the White House.

Some were paid astonishing salaries. Ahmed al-Rikaby, in charge of re-establishing Iraqi television, discovered that he was to be assisted by three Iraqi-American media advisers paid $21,000 (lbs11,600) a month. He recalls: "They

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Presidential Elections

Not as Big a Deal as They Say

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Freshets of creativity and excitement pulsing into the nation's blood stream, improvements in the general quality of life, have nothing to do with the presidential elections rolling around every four years, which rouse expectations far in excess of what they actually deserve. As registers of liberal or conservative political potency, American presidential elections seldom coincide with shifts in the tempo of political energy across the country. As vehicles for the ventilation of popular concerns, they are hopelessly inadequate, and should be severely downgraded on the entertainment calendars.

Take a couple of profound changes in the quality of life over the past thirty years. You can now buy good coffee, shoulder to shoulder at the coffee stand with a construction worker with hair in a ponytail and a tactful gold ring in his ear, anywhere in America from Baltimore to San Pedro, Key West to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. No American political party ever wrote a commitment to better cappuccino into its platform. At the level of "policy", the World Bank, dominated by the US, threw billions at Vietnam a few years ago to grow bad coffee and undermine what progress has occurred. From the late 60s on, the hippies roasted Arabica coffee beans. Then, when Communism foundered (a collapse that owed nothing to Ronald Reagan) and Uncle Sam had no need to buy the loyalty of its Latin American allies with the guaranteed prices scheduled under the International Coffee Agreement, the market changed, and new coffee growers nosed into the market. The quality of life went up markedly.

The bread's got better too and so have the vegetables, thanks once again to the hippies, organic farms, farmers' markets and community-supported agricultural networks. No thanks here to party platforms, or presidential candidates, or Congress people, all of whom are in the pay of the big food companies, which have killed more Americans than the Pentagon by a factor of hundreds, and which, having failed to outlaw genuinely organic food, have now captured its name and altered its meaning. Over the past thirty years the meat's got worse, as small wholesale butchers have gone to the wall, bankrupted by the coalition of food regulators and big food processors, the latter industry now dominated by two vast meatpacking combines, Tyson and Smithfield.

You want to see fascism in action in America? Look beyond the Patriot Act, engendered in the Clinton era with the Counter-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, and consummated by bipartisan agreement after 9/11, 2001. Try your local health department, bearing down on some small business. Better still, visit family court. No candidate goes out on the hustings and pledges to reform family courts so that their actions have some detectable linkage to the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights. No Republican or Democratic platform committee has ever devoted a paragraph to family courts. Yet there, day after day, week after week, relationships are destroyed, children severed irrevocably from parents and extended kin, fathers forbidden access to their children, their wages garnished, their bank accounts looted, staggering fines levied, without the possibility of challenge. (And no, this is not the defeated whine of a

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(**Green Zone** *continued from page 1)*

had no expertise and never helped me or anybody else." They got the jobs because they had influential friends in the Pentagon. US officials were extraordinarily arrogant. Few things mattered more to American credibility in Iraq than restoring the electricity supply. Ordinary Iraqis are infuriated by the continuing blackouts. They repeatedly ask why the nation which could send a man to the moon cannot supply Baghdad with more than 12 hours of electricity a day.

"The Americans tried to do everything themselves and they failed," says Raad al-Haref, the deputy Electricity Minister. "We had to renegotiate with all our foreign suppliers through American companies and this took about eight months."

Iraqis often say they were astonished by the level of cronyism in Washington's appointments. Privatisation was a high priority for the US administrator, Paul Bremer. But his chief aide in developing the private sector was a Republican businessman from Connecticut called Thomas Foley who was an assiduous fund-raiser for his party but otherwise had little experience useful in Iraq. The CPA might also, given the political background of its senior members and their ideological commitment to private enterprise, be expected to have encouraged the reopening of the Baghdad stock exchange. In fact it remained shut for over a year at the insistence of the CPA, though an Iraqi stockbroker Hussain Kubba said: "There was no reason it should not have opened soon after the war."

One of the main reasons the stock exchange, which used to employ 5,000 people, stayed shut could be that the CPA had appointed a 24-year-old Republican to oversee it. He had originally applied for a political job at the White House and had, so far as the Iraqis who dealt with him could see, very limited knowledge of stock exchanges.

Mr Kubba says that what happened to the Baghdad stock exchange "shows the miserable performance of the CPA as a whole and how brilliantly Iraqis can do things when they are allowed to". He adds proudly that as soon as Iraqis were put back in control they were able to reopen the stock exchange in a few weeks.

Many CPA officials spent short but remunerative tours in Iraq. Others, surprisingly, have returned, evidently smelling money still to be made. Mr Kubba says: "They think they can use the connections they built up before and the fact that they are Americans."

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Could John Doar Have Saved Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner?

By David Kotz

This is the text of Kotz's remarks at the at 40th Commemoration of the Killing of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner held at Mt. Zion Church, Longdale, Neshoba County, Mississippi on June 20, 2004.

In June 1964 I attended the first orientation session for Mississippi Summer Project volunteers in Oxford, Ohio. At that session I was selected to work in Meridian for the summer. On June 19, eight of us left for Mississippi in a station wagon: Jimmy Chaney, Andy Goodman, Micky Schwerner, myself, and 4 other summer volunteers.

We arrived in Meridian on June 20, 1964. The next morning Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman left to go to Neshoba County to investigate the burning of Mt. Zion Church, which had occurred while we were in Ohio. When the three did not return by 4 P.M., the designated return time, we began making phone calls. We had been trained about what to do in such a situation and we acted based on our training.

Shortly after 4 P.M. we called the Jackson COFO office, and they asked us to phone the local jails in Neshoba County. When we called the jail in Philadelphia, we were told that the three civil rights workers had not been seen, but that was a lie, since in fact at that moment the Deputy Sheriff was holding the three in his jail.

A short while later we phoned the Justice Department in Washington and we spoke with John Doar, who was in charge of Civil Rights enforcement. (Mr. Doar later became nationally prominent as the chief attorney for the Watergate Commission.) We asked him to instruct the FBI to call the local jails to inquire about the three missing civil rights workers. He refused to do so, stating that he could not act until 72 hours had passed, since that was the time that must elapse before a missing persons report can be filed. We told him that this was not a case of someone walking out after a marital dispute, but that three civil rights workers were missing in a part of Mississippi known to have a lot of Ku Klux Klan activity. We begged him to order the FBI to call the local jails. He continued to refuse.

Had John Doar done what we requested, and had the FBI called the jail in Philadelphia, it is possible the Deputy Sheriff Price would have gotten cold feet and not carried out his plan of taking the three civil rights workers out and murdering them. We will never know.

From these events, I learned that the system of racial segregation in Mississippi, and in the rest of the South, with its racial injustice, economic injustice, and violence, was not based just in Mississippi and the South. It was part of the system of power in the U.S. John Doar's refusal to order the FBI to make those phone calls was a reflection of the fact that the national power structure was reluctant to intervene in the segregationist system, because of the tie between the Southern Democratic Senators and the national Democratic Party.

The sacrifice made that summer forty years ago by the three murdered civil rights workers, together with the example of the African American people of Mississippi rising up against their oppression, inspired me, and many of my generation, to dedicate our lives to ending racial injustice, economic injustice, and violence. These problems have continued to fester in our country and our world, from the Vietnam War up until today. This job is not over. We still need to work to build a different world of racial equality, economic justice, and peace. CP

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(**Election** *continued from page 1*)

wronged dad.)

Judicial appointments are often the last frantic argument of a liberal urging all back in under the Big Democratic Tent. But these days the decay of liberalism is reflected in the quality of judges installed in the federal district courts. The Blacks, Douglases, Marshalls and Brennans were conjured to greatness by historical circumstance first, and only later by the good fortune of confirmed nomination. Today's historical circumstances are not throwing up Blacks, Douglases, Marshalls and Brennans, even if a Democratic president has the opportunity and backbone to nominate them. And at the level of the US Supreme Court, history is captious. The two best of the current bunch, Stevens and Souter, were nominated by Republican presidents, Ford and G.W.H. Bush. You'll as likely find a maverick on the conservative as on the liberal end of a judicial bench.

Every four years liberals unhitch the cart and put it in front of the horse, arguing that the only way to a safer, better tomorrow will be if everyone votes for the Democratic nominee. But unless the nominee and Congress are shoved forward by social currents too strong for them to defy or ignore, then nothing except the usual bad things will transpire. In the American Empire of today, the default path chosen by the country's supreme commanders and their respective parties is never toward the good. Our task is not to dither in distraction over the lesser of two evil prospects, which turns out to be only a detour along the same highway.

The way they are now set up, presidential contests focused well nigh exclusively on the candidates of the two major parties are worse than useless in furnishing an opportunity for any useful national debate. In 2000 Ralph Nader got about five minutes face time on the national networks. It would be an improvement, and certainly more interesting, if the big four-year debate centered on which definitions of mental complaints should be added to or subtracted from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* which governs official diagnoses of America's mental and emotional condition and which is revised every few years. Recalling one such revision in the 1970s, Phil Johnson, a gay man from Dallas, said in the film *After Stonewall*, "I went to bed one night, I was sick and depraved, and when I woke up the next morning I discovered I'd been cured." In 2004 Bush could have campaigned for the removal of ADD, arguing it's a natural and useful condition, emblem of presidential greatness.

The central political issue in this first decade of the 21st century is the decay of the American political system and of the two prime parties that share the spoils. Wherever one looks, at the gerrymandered districts, the balloting methods, the fundraising, corruption fumes like vapors from a vast swamp. In the House of Representatives today, only some 35 seats are in serious contention. The rest have been gerrymandered into permanent incumbencies. Congress itself is an infinitely drearier, more conformist place than it was two or three decades ago. Vivid souls like Wright Patman and Henry Gonzalez of Texas, in whose hearts the coals of populist insurgency still glowed, are long gone. Today, where are the Ernest Gruenings, the Wayne Morses, the Harold Hughes, who stood out against the rush to war in the Vietnam years? In the US Senate, amid the march on Iraq we heard an eloquent echo from Robert Byrd, and from one or two others including Ted Kennedy. In the House, entirely alone on one occasion, Barbaras Lee. In the House you can count the true mavericks on the fingers of both hands, and almost always you'll find there Ron Paul, the libertarian Republican from Texas' second district, running south along the Gulf coast toward Corpus Christi, whence Ronald Reagan once quavered theatrtically, to a respectful press, that the Sandinista army would come blazing up State Highway 77 from Harlingen, after a march Hannibal would have envied, from Nicaragua, through Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico.

"It might have been better to let things run wild – to have a peasants' revolt", said McCarthy.

On the calendar of standard-issue American politics, the quadrennial presidential contests have offered, across the past 40 years, a relentlessly shrinking menu. To go back to 1964, the Democratic convention that nominated Lyndon Johnson saw the Democratic Party powers scorn the legitimate claim of Fannie Lou Hamer and her fellow crusaders in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to be the lawful Mississippi delegation. The black insurgents went down to defeat in a battle that remained etched in the political consciousness of those who partook in or even observed the fray. There was political division, the bugle blare and saber slashes of genuine struggle.

By 1968 there was still a run against LBJ, albeit more polite in form, with Eugene McCarthy's challenge to Lyndon Johnson. McCarthy's call for schism was an eminently respectable one, from a man who had risen through the US Senate as an orthodox Democratic cold-war liberal. He himself saw the limits of his "test of the system". "It might have been better", he remarked to the reporter Andrew Kopkind in the midst of his campaign, "to let things run wild – to have a peasants' revolt. Maybe it would have been better to stand back and let people light fires on the hill." As he well knew, the Democratic Party exists to suppress peasants' revolts and douse fires on the hill.

Four years later, when George McGovern again kindled the antiwar torch, the party's established powers, the labor chieftains and the money men, did their best to douse his modest smoulder, deliberately surrendering the field to Richard Nixon, for whom many of them voted. And yet, by today's standards, that strange man Nixon, under whose aegis the Environmental Protection Agency was founded, the Occupational Safety and Health Act passed, Earth Day first celebrated, and Keynesianism accepted as a fact of life, would have been regarded as impossibly radical. And he did these things because of the historical circumstances which forced him in that direction.

With Jimmy Carter came the omens of neoliberalism, which later flowered in the Clinton years under the logo of the Democratic Leadership Council. Resistance came in 1976 with Barry Commoner and his Citizens' Party, then in 1979-80 with Senator Edward Kennedy's challenge to Carter for the nomination under the battle standard of old-line New Deal liberalism. There was also Republican John Anderson's independent run as a moderate.

The two Democratic presidential nominees of the 1980s, Fritz Mondale in

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1984 and Michael Dukakis in 1988, saw party leaders and pundits massed protectively, standing shoulder to shoulder against the last coherent left populist campaign in America mounted within the framework of the Democratic Party, by Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition. The Democratic Party gave its rebuttal to Jackson and the Rainbow with Clinton in 1992 and again in 1996. As JoAnn Wypijewski succinctly puts it, "By a brisk accounting of 1993 to 2000, the black stripe of the Rainbow got the Crime Bill, women got 'welfare reform', labor got NAFTA, gays and lesbians got the Defense of Marriage Act. Even with a Democratic Congress in the early years, the peace crowd got no cuts in the military; unions got no help on the right to organize; advocates of DC statehood got nothing (though statehood would virtually guarantee two more Democratic Senate seats and more representation in the House); the single-payer crowd got worse than nothing. Between Clinton's inaugural and the day he left office, 700,000 more persons were incarcerated, mostly minorities; today one in eight black men is barred from voting because of prison, probation or parole."

It was just before his re-election campaign, in 1996, that Bill Clinton took for his own the Republican proposal for "welfare reform", even worse than his original proposal for "reform" in 1992. Victory was assured, but he followed through anyway on a bill he knew was rotten. Liberals were aghast but did nothing. There was no insurgency, no rocking of the boat, no "divisive" challenge on that or anything else. The Democratic Party, from DLC governors to liberal public-interest groups mustered around their leader and marched into the late Nineties arm in arm along the path sign-posted toward the greatest orgy of corporate theft in the history of the planet, deregulation of banking and food safety, rates of logging six times those achieved in the subsequent Bush years, a war on Yugoslavia, a vast expansion of the death penalty, re-affirmation of racist drug laws, the foundations of the Patriot Act.

Through the Clinton years the Democratic Party remained "united" in fealty to corporate corruption and right-wing class viciousness, and so inevitably and appropriately, the Nader-centered independent challenge was born, modestly in 1996, strongly in 2000 and again in 2004, joining such other independent campaigns as Ross Perot's, whose entrance on the scene in 1992 actually cost G.H.W. Bush re-election but never provoked such hysteria on the Republican end of the spectrum as burst over Nader's head in 2000 and again, even more hysterically in 2004. The rationale for Nader's challenge was as sound as it was for Henry Wallace half a century earlier. I quote from *The Third Party* , a little pamphlet by Adam Lapin published in 1948 in support of Wallace and his Progressive Party, found in a box of left literature sent to me in June 2004 by my friend Honey Williams of Carmel Highlands, cleaning house after the death of her uncle Dick Criley. (She'd promised me some crab apple scions for grafting, and I was a mite put out to find souvenirs of Dick's political library, such as Plekhanov and Lenin, lurking in the box instead.)

"Every scheme of the lobbyists to fleece the public became law in the 80th Congress. And every constructive proposal to benefit the common people gathered dust in committee pigeonholes… The bipartisan bloc, the Republocratic cabal which ruled Congress and made a mockery of President Roosevelt's economic bill of rights, also wrecked the Roosevelt foreign policy.… A new foreign policy was developed. This policy was still gilded with the good words of democracy. But its Holy Grail was oil.…

"The Democratic administration carries the ball for Wall Street's foreign policy. And the Republican party carries the ball for Wall Street's domestic policy.… Of course the roles are sometimes interchangeable. It was President Truman who broke the 1946 railroad strike, asked for legislation to conscript strikers and initiated the heavy fines against the miners' union.

"On occasion President Truman still likes to lay an occasional verbal wreath on the grave of the New Deal.… But the hard facts of roll call votes show that Democrats are voting more and more like Republicans. If the Republican Taft-Hartley bill became law over the President's veto, it was because many of the Democrats allied themselves to the Republicans. Only 71 House Democrats voted to sustain the Prersident's veto while 106 voted to override it. In the Senate 20 Democrats voted to override the veto and 22 voted to sustain it."

There you have it: the law that was to enable capital to destroy organized labor when it became convenient was passed by a bipartisan vote (and with more than just southern Democrats), something you will never learn from the AFL-CIO, or from a thousand hoarse throats at Democratic rallies when the candidate is whoring for the labor vote. In the Clinton years, union membership as a percentage of the work force dropped, as well it might, because he did nothing to try to change laws or to intervene in disputes.

Clinton presided over passage of NAFTA, insulting labor further with the farce of side agreements on labor rights that would never be enforced. End result: half the companies involved in organizing drives in the US intimidate workers by saying that a union vote will force the company to leave town; 30 percent of them fire the union activists (about 20,000 workers a year); only one in seven organizing drives has a chance of going to a vote, and of those that do result in a yes vote for the union, less than one in five has any success in getting a contract.

By May 1993, as any kind of progressive challenge to business-as-usual, the Clinton presidency had failed, even by the measure of its own timid promises.

So while many saw the rapid decline in union membership as just a melancholy index of the passing of the old economy, making way for a cornucopia of New Economy jobs that would be high-paying affairs with plenty of stock options for workers, the reality is otherwise. Most New Economy jobs are in fact low-tech, low-skill, low-paying jobs with no future. Polls suggest that 60 percent of non-unionized workers say they would join a union if they had a chance. The Democrats have produced no laws, indeed have campaigned against laws that would make that attainable. John Kerry's proposal on the minimum wage in 2004 would raise it to $7 an hour by 2007, which would bring a full-time worker up to two-thirds of the poverty level.

One useful way of estimating how little separates the Democratic and Repub-

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lican parties, and particularly their presidential nominees, is to tot up the issues on which there is tacit agreement either as a matter of principle or with an expedient nod-and-wink that these are not matters suitable to be discussed in any public forum, beyond pro forma sloganeering: the role of the Federal Reserve, trade policy, economic redistribution, the role and budget of the CIA and other intelligence agencies, nuclear disarmament, allocation of military procurement, reduction of the military budget, the roles and policies of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and kindred multilateral agencies, crime, punishment and the prison explosion, the war on drugs, corporate welfare, energy policy, forest policy, the destruction of small farmers and ranchers, Israel, the corruption of the political system.

Let us suppose that a Democratic candidate arrives in the White House, at least rhetorically committed to reform, as happened with Jimmy Carter in 1977 and Clinton in 1993. Both had Democratic majorities in Congress. Battered from their first weeks for any unorthodox nominees and for any deviation from Wall Street's agenda in their first budgets, both had effectively lost any innovative purchase on the system by the end of their first six months, and there was no pressure from the left to hold them to their pledges. Carter was torn apart by the press for his OMB director nominee, Bert Lance; Clinton, for gays in the military.

As a candidate in 1984 Mondale advanced the schedule of surrender to the period of his doomed candidacy, filing to change his political identity to that of Ronald Reagan by September of that campaign year. Reagan claimed that Nicaragua was exporting revolution to the rest of Latin America and so did Mondale. Reagan said Nicaragua should be "pressured" till it mended its ways, and so did Mondale. Reagan said he would invade Nicaragua if it bought 28-year-old Soviet MIG-21s and so did Mondale. Reagan blamed the missile crisis in Europe on the Russians and so did Mondale. Reagan wanted to hike the military budget and so did Mondale. Reagan was bad on the Middle East, and Mondale was worse. Mondale promised to raised taxes and cut social spending. Four years later, battered by charges he was a closet liberal, Dukakis swiftly collapsed.

By the end of April 1993, Clinton had sold out the Haitian refugees; handed Africa policy to a Bush appointee, Herman Cohen, thus giving Jonas Savimbi the green light in Angola to butcher thousands; put Israel's lobbyists in charge of Mideast policy; bolstered the arms industry with a budget in which projected spending for 1993-94 was higher in constant dollars than average spending in the Cold War from 1950 onward; increased secret intelligence spending; maintained full DEA funding; put Wall Street in charge of national economic strategy; sold out on grazing and mineral rights on public lands; pushed NAFTA forward; plunged into the "managed care" disaster offered by him and Hillary Rodham Clinton as "health reform".

By the end of May 1993, as any kind of progressive challenge to business-as-usual, the Clinton presidency had failed, even by the measure of its own timid promises. The recruitment of the old Nixon/Reagan/Bush hand David Gergen as the president's new public relations man signaled the surrender.

By 2000, with the Nader challenge, the most common reaction of Democrats was not debate but affront at the scandalous impertinence of his candidacy. A common reaction, both in 2000 with Gore and 2004 with Kerry, was the furious cry, "Don't talk to me about Gore!" or "I don't want to hear a word against Kerry!" It was as though the Democratic candidate was entombed, pending resurrection as president, with an honor guard of the National Organization of Women, the AFL-CIO, the League of Conservation Voters, Taxpayers for Justice, the NAACP. To open the tomb prematurely to admit the oxygen of life and criticism was to commit an intolerable blasphemy against political propriety. Amid the defilements of our political system, and the collapse of all serious political debate among the liberals and most of the left, the Democratic candidate becomes a kind of Hegelian Anybody, as in Anybody But…

The Kerry candidacy in 2004? As an inspirational candidate, even one whom polls predicted in early summer of 2004 would most likely end up in the White House, he is a dud, as damp a political squib as Michael Dukakis. Three terms in the US Senate have left almost no footprints of interest, except to Karl Rove's propagandists eager to transform this utterly conventional figure into a seditious radical, hell-bent on putting the Pentagon out of business. A seasoned staffer on one of the military appropriations committees described Kerry deprecatingly to me as "the ghost senator; around here he doesn't count for anything."

In the early days of his Senate career Kerry made headlines with hearings on contra-CIA drug smuggling and on BCCI, the crooked Pakistan-bank linked to the CIA. Some of the Senate elders must have told him to mind his manners. The watchdog's barks died abruptly.

Kerry offers himself up mainly as a more competent manager of the Bush agenda, a steadier hand on the helm of the Empire. His pedigree is immaculate. He was present at the founding of the Democratic Leadership Council, the claque of neoliberals that has sought to reshape it as a hawkish and pro-business party with a soft spot for abortion—essentially a stingier version of the Rockefeller Republicans. Kerry enthusiastically backed both of Bush's wars, and in June of 2004, at the very moment Bush signaled a desire to retreat, the senator called for 25,000 new troops to be sent to Iraq, with a plan for the US military to remain entrenched there for at least the next four years.

Kerry supported the Patriot Act without reservation or even much contemplation. Lest you conclude that this was a momentary aberration sparked by the post-9/11 hysteria, consider the fact that Kerry also voted for the two Clinton-era pred-

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(**Election** *continued from page 5)*

ecessors to the Patriot Act, the 1994 Crime Bill and the 1996 Counter-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act.

Although, once his nomination was assured he regularly hammed it up in photo-ops with the barons of big labor, Kerry voted for NAFTA, the WTO and virtually every other job-slashing trade pact that came before the Senate. He courted and won the endorsement of nearly every police association in the nation, regularly calling for another 100,000 cops on the streets and even tougher criminal sanctions against victimless crimes. He refused to reconsider his fervid support for the insane war on drug users, which has destroyed families and clogged our prisons with more than 2 million people, many of them young black men, whom the draconian drug laws specifically target without mercy. Kerry backed the racist death penalty and minimum mandatory sentences.

Like Joe Lieberman, Kerry marketed himself as a cultural prude, regularly chiding teens about the kind of clothes they wear, the music they listen to and the movies they watch. But even Lieberman didn't go so far as to support the Communications Decency Act. Kerry did. Fortunately, even this Supreme Court had the sense to strike the law down, ruling that it trampled across the First Amendment.

All of this is standard fare for contemporary Democrats. But Kerry always went the extra mile. The senator cast a crucial vote for Clinton's bill to dismantle welfare for poor mothers and their children.

Bush's path to war was cleared by the Democrats, who were passive at best and deeply complicit at worst. House leader Dick Gephardt and Senator Joe Lieberman rushed to the White House to stand beside Bush in a Rose Garden war rally, where they pledged their support for the invasion of Iraq. Like John Kerry, vice presidential pick John Edwards went along with the war. So did the rest of the Democratic leadership.

Most didn't even express regrets. Take Senate Majority leader Tom Daschle. Nearly a year after the war was launched, after every pretext had dissolved and the US military found itself mired in a bloody and hopeless occupation, Daschle pronounced himself satisfied with the war's progress.

Bush's performance and personality have been etched well past caricature by dozens of furious assailants, culminating in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the Democrats' prime campaign offering, and something the Republicans had coming to them for trying to nail Clinton for his affair with Monica Lewinsky.

There is no need to labor the details of Bush's ghastly incumbency in these pages. He came by his fortune and his presidency dishonestly. Official rebirth in Christ did not lead him, a former sinner, to compassion but to vindictiveness. Genes and education turned into a Mendelian stew of all that's worst and most vulgar in the character traits of the elites of the Northeast and of Texas. A more limited occupant of the Oval Office is hard to recall or conceive of.

All the more striking therefore was it, as 2004 lurched forward, to mark the lack of exuberance, the poverty of expectations among Kerry's supporters. A more limited challenge to the incumbent was similarly hard to conceive of as, month by month, Kerry methodically disappointed one more liberal constituency. In April it was labor, admonished that Kerry's prime task would be to battle the deficit. In May and again in July it was women, informed that the candidate shared with the anti-abortion lobby its view of the relationship between conception and the start of life and that he would be prepared to nominate anti-choice judges. In June it was the anti-war legions, to whom Kerry pledged four more years of occupation in Iraq.

Thirty-eight years ago Martin Luther King was booed at a mass meeting in Chicago. Later, as he lay sleepless, he understood why:

"For twelve years I, and others like me, had held out radiant promises of progress. I had preached to them about my dream. I had lectured to them about the not too distant day when they would have freedom, 'all, here and now.' I urged them to have faith in America and in white society. Their hopes had soared. They were now booing because they felt we were unable to deliver on our promises. They were booing because we had urged them to have faith in people who had too often proved to be unfaithful. They were now hostile because they were watching the dream they had so readily accepted turn into a nightmare."

King, as Andrew Kopkind wrote at the time, quoting that passage, had been outstripped by his times and knew it. Nearly forty years later the times, and America's needs, have far, far outstripped the party which at that moment of despair in Chicago King saw as the betrayer of so many hopes.

The creative task beckons to us, not in the designated "protest space" sanctioned and invigilated by the powers that be. CP

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